

Improving Equality in PCS Weight Allowances Across the Ranks

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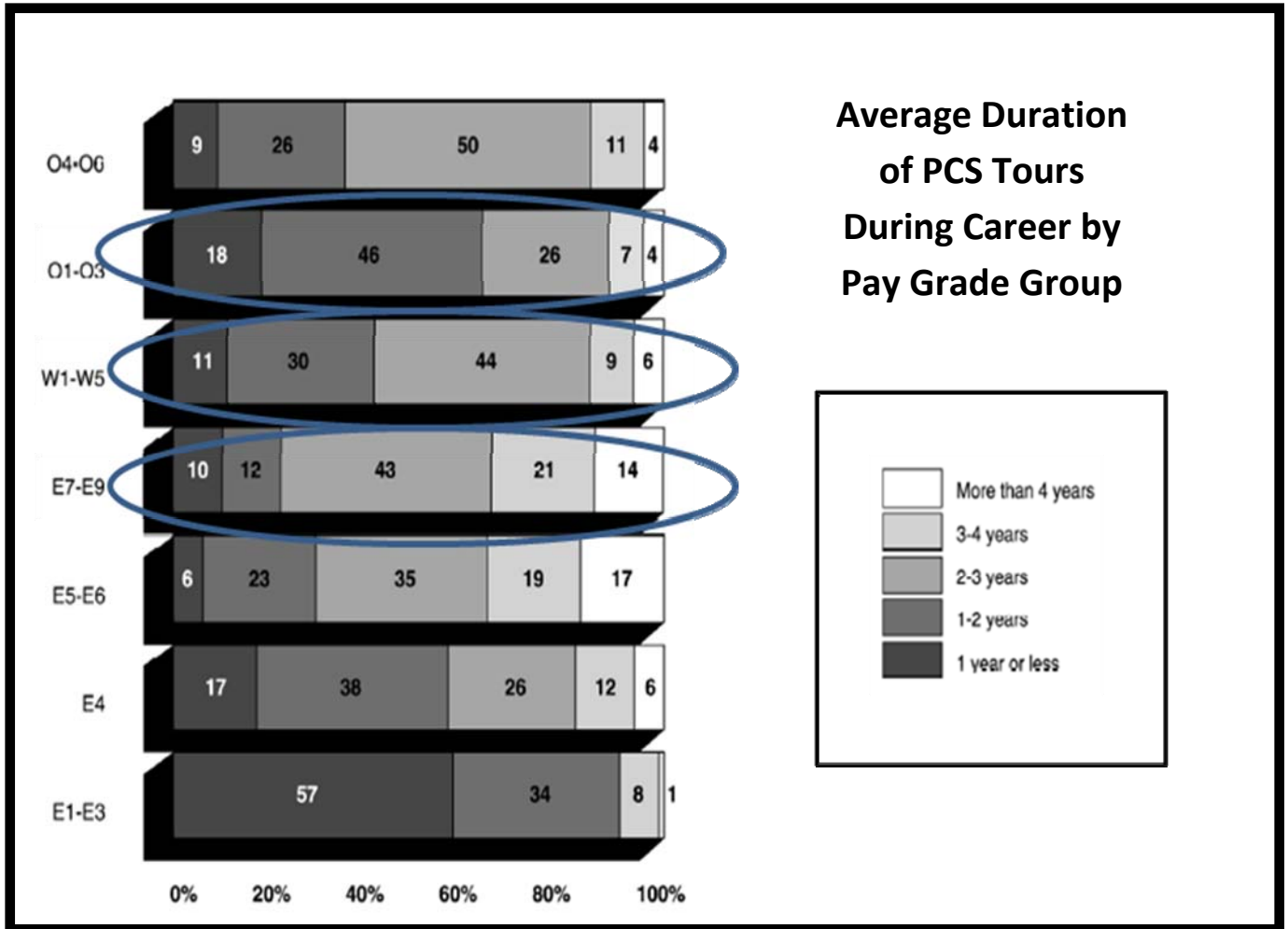
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Relocation allowances for permanent change of station moves

The Department of Defense reports that every year, about one-third of all military members move. Each of these transitions creates financial burdens for these military members. United States General Accounting Office reports, "according to DOD, mid-grade and senior non-commissioned officers (enlisted personnel in grades E-5 to E-9) average more than \$1,000 in nonreimbursable expenses each time they move. Officers absorb an even a greater amount."¹ Often these nonreimbursable expenses are incurred because the service members' personal belongings outweigh their maximum weight allowances as defined in United States Code, Title 37, Section 406 (b) (1) (C) (see appendix 1 for USC). Current household goods weight allowances are based solely on a service member's present grade - the higher the pay grade, the higher the maximum allowance. However, no records show why the maximum allowances were established at the current levels.² Each branch of service adheres to the same regulations when conducting a move within the United States. Service members' relocation allowances for household goods should be based on rank; however, service members must be apportioned additional weight for the number of years of service as well as number of dependents to ensure equity across the ranks.

Background Information

According to a survey conducted in the summer of 2001 by the Defense Capabilities and Management Office, the average time between permanent change of station (PCS) moves is about two years. The Defense Capabilities and Management Office works directly for Congress and conducts Department of Defense audits based on Congress's requests. The chart below, submitted to Congress by the Capabilities and Management Office, depicts service members' average duration of time on station before conducting PCS moves. According to the Defense Capabilities and Management Office, 65% of E-8s and 85% of W-2s, throughout the Department of Defense, will PCS before spending three years on station. Furthermore, the Defense Capabilities and Management Office found the Marine Corps had the shortest average time between PCS.³ Thus, Marine E-8s and W-2s move more often than depicted by the chart. These two grades have significant disparity between weight allowances, and yet they are both mandated to move generally with less than three years on station. Because service members are required to move so often, ensuring adequate compensation is vital.



Current rank-based weight allowances

The Assistant Secretary of Defense (Manpower, Installations and Logistics) stated, "Weight allowances are based on grade to recognize each member's relative position and responsibility ... the system recognizes that with the increased rank and income, the member's personal property increases."⁴ Basing allowances solely on grade creates disparity among the ranks. When comparing household good weight allowances for an officer and an

enlisted service member who have the same time in service (in most cases when the enlisted member has greater years of service) officers have a higher basic housing allowance. For example, an O-1 who has just entered the service rates almost the same weight allowance that an E-7 does who has been in the service for ten plus years. It is unjust to provide a lower weight allowance for this E-7 because he or she has a comparable or lower income than the O-1. According to the weight restrictions established by U.S. Code, Title 37, Section 406, an O-2, W-2, and an E-8 with dependents rate the same weight allowance (13,500 lbs) when conducting a PCS transition.⁵ Because household goods weight restrictions are based solely on a service member's present grade, the restricted allowances fail to compensate many service members for the normal accumulation of goods that occur as a career progresses and as a family grows.

Impact of service length on accumulation of goods

According to the chart below, the minimum time in service for an O-2 is two years compared with an E-8 whose minimum time in service spans over 18 years.⁶ A W-2 from a technical military occupation specialty has a minimum time in service of 9.5 years, while an W-2 from a non-technical specialty has a minimum of 17.5 years of service.⁷ However, because E-8s and W-2s have a

significantly greater amounts of time in service than an O-2, they presumably accumulate larger amounts of personal property than an O-2, yet they are apportioned the same weight allowance with the current regulations. To ensure equity across the officer and enlisted ranks, service members must be apportioned additional weight for the number of years of service.

Impact of growing families on accumulation of goods

The average age for an E-8 ranges from 36 to 46 years old; by comparison, the average age of an O-2 is 25 years old. As service members age, their families grow. In the Marine Corps, only 21% of O-2s have two or more dependents; in contrast, 80% of E-8s and W-2s have two or more dependents.⁸ With each additional dependent, household goods are increased, and yet the compensation to the service member is not increased. To fairly allocate weight restrictions, weight allowances for an O-2, W-2, and an E-8 could remain at 13,500 pounds; however, each service member would rate an additional 100 pounds for each year of service and 200 pounds for each additional dependent. However, a service members' weight allowance could not exceed the maximum weight allowance.

Weight Allowance and Time in Service for Pay Grade

Pay Grade	Min TIS	With Dependents	Pay Grade	Min TIS	With Dependents
O-6(+)	21 - 23	18,000	E-9	22.9	14,500
O-5	15 - 17	17,500	E-8	18.2	13,500
O-4	9 - 11	17,000	E-7	13.3	12,500
O-3	4	14,500	E-6	8.5	11,000
O-2	2	13,500	E-5	4.7	9,000
O-1	0	12,000	E-4	2.9	8,000
W-5	18.5 - 26.5	17,500	E-3	1.4	8,000
W-4	15.5 - 23.5	17,000	E-2	.5	8,000
W-3	12.5 - 20.5	14,500	E-1	0	8,000
W-2	9.5 - 17.5	13,500			
W-1	8 - 16	12,000			

Burden on service member to avoid weight allowance overages

Because the disparity in fair compensation exists, service members face either paying a fee for going over their weight allowances or choosing one or more of the following options: purging their household goods, conducting a Do-It-Yourself (DITY) or partial DITY move, and/or storing personal items in order to meet their weight requirements. To avoid arduous financial penalties, service members often jettison personal

property prior to a PCS move.⁹ When items are purged prior to a PSC move they will need to be replaced once the service member reaches his or her new duty station. A second option is for the service member to execute a DITY or partial DITY move in order to minimize the weight moved by the government, creating additional burdens of transport, gas, and equipment fees. The third option is for the service member to store his or her own personal property in a storage facility to avoid surpassing his or her weight allowance. Using this option, the service member will incur storage fees. Ultimately, each of these options requires the service member to bear the burden of additional fees to avoid weight overages. If service members were apportioned additional weight allowances for years of service as well as number of dependents these additional burdens would be minimized.

Stress created by unrealistic weight restrictions

In most cases the service member does not realize he or she has to pay for excess weight until the completion of the move. At this point the service member receives the bill of lading from the moving company. A service member may have parted with valuable items unnecessarily in order to avoid excess weight fees only to find out that he or she was well within his or her

allotted weight limit. This undue hardship will not completely be mitigated; however, allocating additional weight allowances for his or her years of service and the number of dependents will greatly minimize stressful PCS moves with respect to unrealistic weight restrictions.

Civilian federal employee weight allowance

Civilian federal employees, including DOD civilian employees, are authorized the maximum weight allowance (18,000 pounds) for employees with dependents and those employees without dependents. These weight allowances are authorized regardless of the number of dependents or years of service.¹⁰ By authorizing civilian employees greater weight allowances, regardless of pay grade, devalues the service members' years of service.

Conclusion

Making a PCS move is never easy for the service member or his or her family. One way to ease the stress would be to lift the financial burden a PSC move puts on the service member due to impractical weight restrictions. To ensure equity across the span of ranks, service members' relocation allowances for household goods should be based on rank; nevertheless, it also needs to account for years of service and number of dependents.

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